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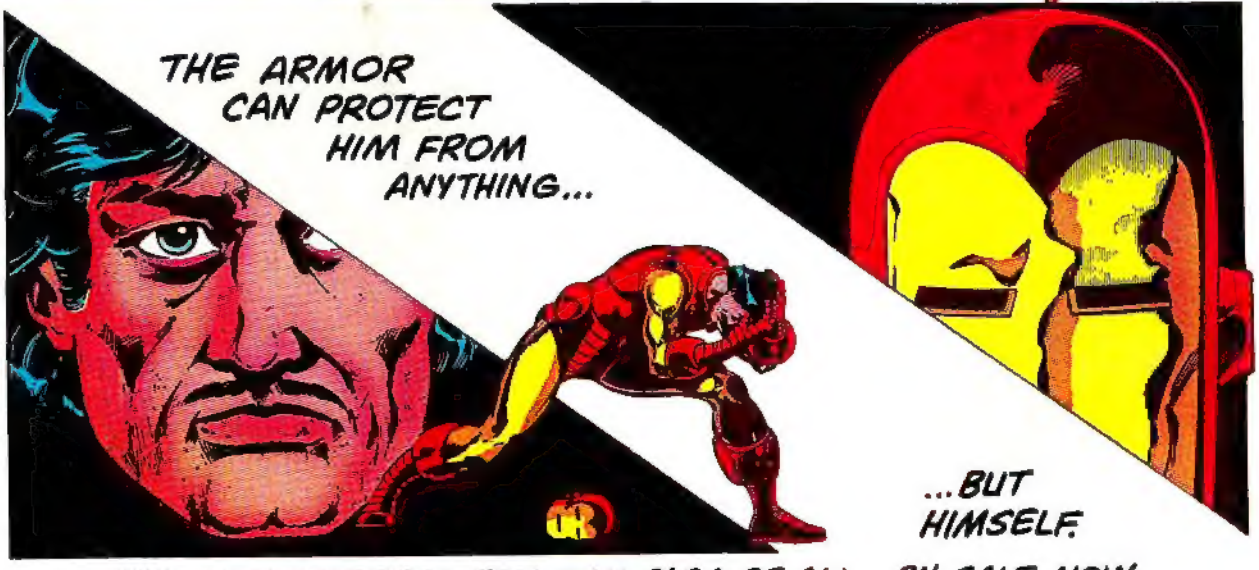
A PREVIEW OF
JOHN BYRNE'S
ALPHA FLIGHT

THE OFFICIAL HANDBOOK OF THE
MARVEL UNIVERSE
EVERYTHING THERE IS TO KNOW ABOUT THE MARVEL SUPER-STARS... 12 ISSUES... 32 PAGES EACH!



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MARVEL AGE

COMING ATTRACTIONS
An advance look at the Marvel Comics you'll see in April 2

THE SPACE SLAMMERS by Walt Simonson
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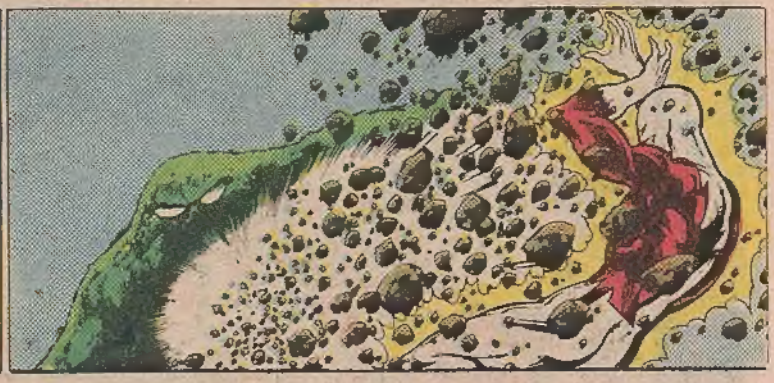
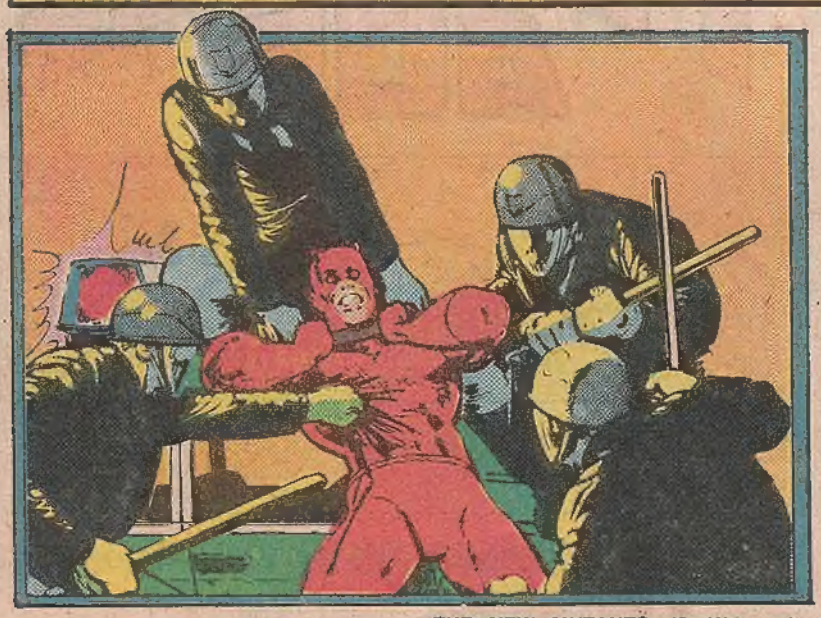
Detailing the triumphant return of Red Sonja and Kull the Conqueror (and Conan, who never left) 14



MARVEL AGE Vol. 1 **No. 2, May, 1983.** Published by MARVEL COMICS GROUP. James E. Galton, President. Stan Lee, Publisher. Michael Hobson, Vice-President, Publishing. Milton Schiffman, Vice-President, Production. OFFICE OF PUBLICATION: 387 PARK AVENUE SOUTH, NEW YORK, N.Y. 10016. Published monthly. Copyright © 1983 by Marvel Comics Group, a division of Cadence Industries Corporation. All rights reserved. Price 25¢ per copy in the U.S. and Canada. Subscription rate $4.00 for 12 issues. Canada and Foreign, $6.00. Printed in the U.S.A. This periodical may not be sold except by authorized dealers and is sold subject to the conditions that it shall not be sold or distributed with any part of its cover or markings removed, nor in a mutilated condition. MARVEL AGE (including all prominent characters featured in the issue), and the distinctive likenesses thereof, are trademarks of and have been copyrighted by the MARVEL COMICS GROUP. THE STAR SLAMMERS Copyright © 1983 by Walt Simonson. Postmaster: Send address changes to: Subscription Dept., Marvel Comics Group, 387 Park Avenue South, New York, N.Y. 10016

MARVEL COMICS



The following comics have an August cover date:

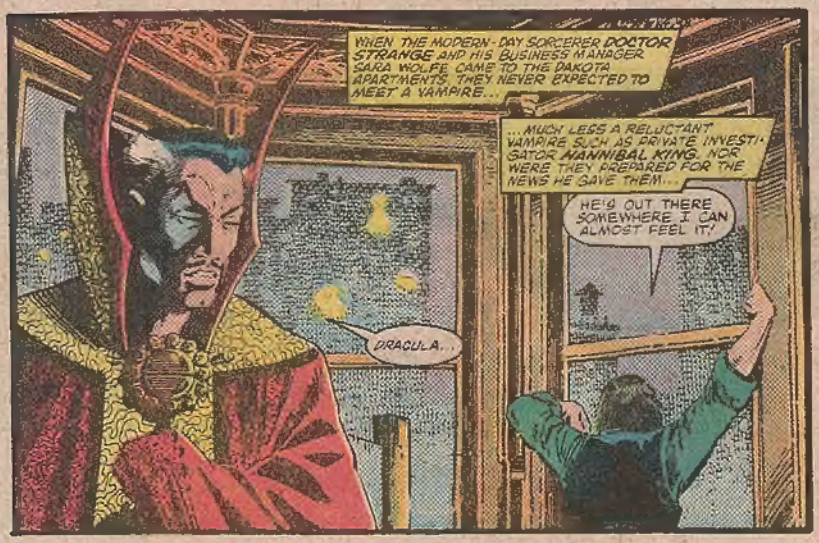
Shipping April 5, 1983; on sale April 26, 1983:

THE THING #2—Written by JOHN BYRNE. Pencils by RON WILSON. Someone Ben Grimm never expected to see again returns as he confronts a woman from his past.

DAREDEVIL #197—Written by DENNY O'NEIL. Pencils and Inks by KLAUS JANSON. Will **Bullseye** recover, enabling him to threaten once again those that **Daredevil** holds dear? Will **Daredevil** stop him? And . . .should he?

THE NEW MUTANTS #6—Written by CHRIS CLAREMONT. Pencils by SAL BUSCEMA. Inks by BOB McLEOD. The **New Mutants** are attending a benefit when abruptly everything happens at once —**Hydra** attacks! **Dani** disappears! The **Marauder** *re*appears! The **Silver Samurai** strikes! And roaring forth comes—**Team America**, with a startling revelation about that group you'll have to see to believe.

INCREDIBLE HULK ANNUAL #12—Written by BILL MANTLO. Pencils by HERB TRIMPE. To a planet populated by green-skinned people and orange-skinned people, living in eternal conflict, the **Hulk** is brought to act as a champion for one of the two sides (guess which one). A thought-provoking story of unbridled prejudice and unlimited power.


WHEN THE MODERN-DAY SORCERER DOCTOR STRANGE AND HIS BUSINESS MANAGER SARA WOLFE CAME TO THE DAKOTA APARTMENTS, THEY NEVER EXPECTED TO MEET A VAMPIRE...
...MUCH LESS A RELUCTANT VAMPIRE SUCH AS PRIVATE INVESTIGATOR HANNIBAL KING. NOR WERE THEY PREPARED FOR THE NEWS HE GAVE THEM...
HE'S OUT THERE SOMEWHERE. I CAN ALMOST FEEL IT.
DRACULA...

Shipping April 12, 1983; on sale May 3, 1983:

THE AMAZING SPIDER-MAN #243—Written by ROGER STERN. Pencils by JOHN ROMITA, JR. Inks by DAN GREEN. The return of everyone's most fantasized-about redhead, **Mary Jane Watson.** Also **Peter Parker** learns how he did on exams and then makes a decision that will forever affect his career as he weighs his "Options."

CAPTAIN AMERICA #284—Written by J.M. DeMATTEIS. Pencils by SAL BUSCEMA. Destinies are "Diverging" as **Cap** and **Bernie** face a turning point in their relation while the **Nomad** seeks his future.

THOR #334—Written by ALAN ZELENETZ. Pencils by RON WILSON. Inks by VINCE COLLETTA. Beginning **Thor's** quest for the **Rune Staff** that will free **Jane Foster** from her imprisonment in the body of **Sif.** But the first step of the journey demands that **Thor** reveal his mortal identity to his greatest rival!

INDIANA JONES #8—Written by DAVID MICHELINIE. Pencils by KERRY GAMMILL. Inks by SAM De La ROSA. More adventure and intrigue on the Amazon as **Indy** and **Marion** search for the lost continent of Atlantis.

U.S. 1 #4—Written by AL MILGROM. Pencils by HERB TRIMPE. Maybe Goodrich doesn't have a blimp, but **U.S. 1** does—he's **Baron Von Blimp,** who challenges the titanic trucker to a startling showdown of Dirigible Power versus Truck Power.

DR. STRANGE #60—Written by ROGER STERN. Pencils by DAN GREEN. Inks by TERRY AUSTIN. Last month not even the Mighty **Thor** was able to stop **Dracula,** so what chance has the **Master of the Mystic Arts?** A large chance if the **Scarlet Witch** has any say in the matter.

Shipping April 19, 1983; on sale May 10, 1983:

INCREDIBLE HULK #286—Written by BILL MANTLO. Pencils by SAL BUSCEMA. The **Hulk** makes the longest leap of his life—into the future, where he lands on a planet that is populated by a race dedicated to eternal conflict. In a place where the only way of life is death, **Green Skin** can only become a "Soldier."

AVENGERS #234—Written by ROGER STERN. Pencils by AL MILGROM. Inks by JOE SINNOTT. A sequel to **Vision/Scarlet Witch #4** and a tie-in with **Dr. Strange #60** as the **Scarlet Witch** comes to town to look after her husband, seriously wounded after his battle with **Annihilus** last ish.

COMING ATTRACTIONS

CONAN #149—Written by BRUCE JONES. Breakdowns by JOHN BUSCEMA. Inks by ERNIE CHAN. **Conan** faces a truly disarming opponent—a monster with the tendency to rend his victims limb from limb.

MARVEL TALES #154—Heads up, **Daredevil** fans, as we reprint this historic early meeting from **Spider-Man #16** as the webhead must "Duel with Daredevil" while the **Ringmaster** and his circus of crime cheers them on. It's that old STAN LEE-STEVE DITKO magic.

ROM #45—Written by BILL MANTLO. Pencils by SAL BUSCEMA. Inks by IAN AKIN & BRIAN GARVEY. It's time to "Cry the Mother Country" as, in the heart of the Soviet Union itself, the **Spaceknight** battles **Vanguard, Darkstar,** and the entire squadron of the **Soviet Super Soldiers.**

G.I. JOE #14—Written by LARRY HAMA. Pencils by MIKE VOSBURG. Inks by JON D'AGOSTINO. The **Joes** are under fire when **Destro** attacks—**Destro,** the master tactician of **Hydra** and sure to be the villain of the year.

THE UNCANNY X-MEN #172—Written by CHRIS CLAREMONT. Pencils by PAUL SMITH. In Japan for **Wolverine** and **Mariko's** wedding, the **X-Men** find themselves in the crossfire of a brutal power struggle. It seems that the **Silver Samurai** is determined to take over the criminal empire left open with the death of **Mariko's** father, even if it means obtaining it over **Mariko's** dead body.

POWER MAN/IRON FIST #96—Written by KURT BUSIEK. Pencils by WILLIAM JOHNSON. What Times Square *really* needs is not a Hero-for-Hire, but someone to protect the *criminals.* And that is just what **Chemistro** intends to provide, just as soon as he gets rid of one stumbling block —**Luke Cage.**

Shipping April 26, 1983; on sale May 17, 1983:

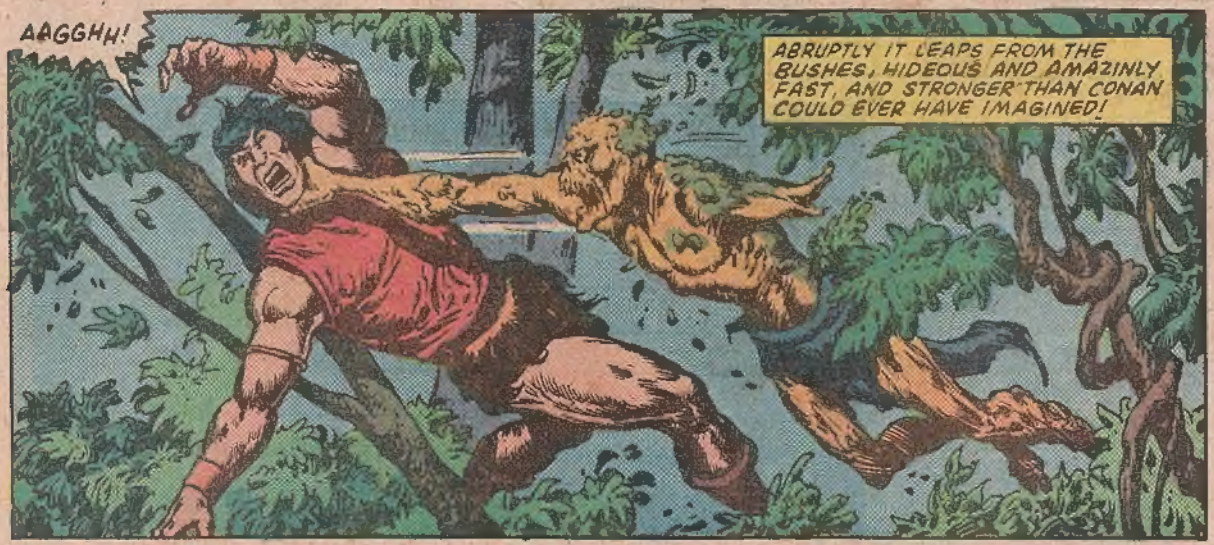
MARVEL TEAM UP #132—Written by J.M. DeMATTEIS. Pencils by SAL BUSCEMA. Inks by MIKE ESPOSITO. What is "The Common Denominator" and how does it figure into the scheme of the new and improved **Everyman?** Here's a hint—it has to do with **Mr. Fantastic,** as **Reed Richards** is abruptly robbed of his most powerful weapon, his mind.

IRON MAN #173—Written by DENNY O'NEIL. Pencils by LUKE McDONNELL. Inks by STEVE MITCHELL. It's been taken over by the government, it's been bankrupt, it's been blown up, but never this. **Stark International** becomes **Stane International** as **Obidiah Stane,** the man who drove **Tony Stark** to drink, finalizes his triumph and takes over **Stark's** beloved business.

STAR WARS #74—Written by DAVID MICHELINIE. Pencils by LUKE McDONNELL. Inks by BOB LAYTON. A flashback sequence involving an old friend of **Luke's** from the planet of Ice, **Hoth.**

FANTASTIC FOUR #257—Written and drawn by JOHN BYRNE. Only one mortal in the past has ever defeated **Galactus,** and that is the **FF's** leader, **Mr. Fantastic.** But the world devourer has returned, and this time **Reed Richards** is nowhere to be found!

DEFENDERS #122—Written by J.M. DeMATTEIS. Pencils by DON PERLIN. The **Iceman** Cometh! **Hellcat** and the **Son of Satan** Goeth! And for you action lovers, you'll be knocked off your pins as—the **Beast** gets a dog and picks up his old-mail!!!



Shipping April 26, 1983; on sale May 17, 1983:

PETER PARKER #81—Written by BILL MANTLO. Pencils by AL MILGROM. Inks by JIM MOONEY. Part two of the titanic struggle between the **Punisher** and **Cloak and Dagger.** And if that isn't enough, the **Punisher** must then battle the **Kingpin** to a brutal conclusion.

THE OFFICIAL HANDBOOK OF THE MARVEL UNIVERSE #8—Covering the good guys and bad guys from **Namorita** to **Pyro,** and featuring FRANK MILLER's **Punisher,** JOHN BYRNE's **Northstar,** and WALT SIMONSON's **Odin.**

ALPHA FLIGHT #1—A JOHN BYRNE production. The long-awaited debut of Marvel's Canadian mutant team as **Alpha Flight** is forced to decide what the future holds for them, but not before battling the man-mountain called **Tundra.** The 48-page introduction to what will be the smash-hit series of 1983.

WHAT IF #40—Written by PETER GILLIS. Pencils by BUTCH GUICE. Try to imagine "What If **Dr. Strange** had never been Master of the Mystic Arts," a world where the supreme magic power is wielded by **Strange's** arch enemy, **Baron Mordo.**

FROM THE EPIC LINE: Shipping April 26

COYOTE #2—Written by STEVE ENGLEHART. Pencilled and inked by STEVE LEIALOHA. We learn the rest of the origin of **Coyote,** and the secret of **Cassie** and **NaTalia.** Also, **Coyote's** showdown with the creature in the trailer.

MARVEL MAGAZINES:

SAVAGE SWORD OF CONAN #90—(Shipping 4/12, on sale 5/3) Written by MICHAEL FLEISCHER. Breakdowns by JOHN BUSCEMA. Finishes by NESTOR REDONDO. There's a city under seige, and a highly superstitious **Cimmerian** is needed to take on an evil king who has harnessed the forces of the Underworld to keep a city captive.

RETURN OF THE JEDI—MARVEL SUPER SPECIAL #26—(Shipping 4/12, on sale 5/3) Written by ARCHIE GOODWIN. Pencils by AL WILLIAMSON. Inks by CARLOS GARZON. Easily the most eagerly-awaited movie adaptation ever done. Witness the battle to rescue **Han Solo** and the fantastic new confrontation between **Luke Skywalker** and **Darth Vader** in the most revelationary **Star Wars** saga of all!

BLIP #5—(Shipping 4/19, on sale 5/10) A column about Home Computers, previews of cartridges you won't see until the fall, the latest word on new hardware from Atari, Intellivision and others, plus the second Blip Design-A-Game contest!

MARVEL AGE #5—(Shipping 4/19, on sale 5/10) Featuring, in addition to the regular columns, an interview with **Daredevil** penciller KLAUS JANSON.

MARVEL COMING RETRACTIONS

Updates on creator changes, or major story changes, on previously announced titles. Hey, when you're discussing titles four months in advance, let's be happy we get the issue numbers right!

INDIANA JONES and faithful sidekick **MARION RAVENWOOD** don't begin their odyssey up the Amazon, in search of lost Atlantis, until issue #7. In issue #6, in a story scripted by **David Michelinie,** pencilled by **Howie Chaykin,** and inked by **Terry Austin, MARION** opens a cafe in New York City, with a "Raiders"-style motif, that seems to attract nothing but a run of bad luck for our hapless hero and heroine. Or is it just bad luck ?

STAR WARS #73 will now feature a story by **Mary Jo Duffy,** pencilled by **Ron Frenz** and inked by **Armando Gil,** in which we witness a team up between **PRINCESS LEIA** and a woman who has designs on none other than **LUKE SKYWALKER.**

The story for **MOON KNIGHT #32,** the oft-promised "Shattered Myths," featuring the dreaded **Druid Walsh,** will now appear in #33 two months later. Issue #32 will feature the second half of "A Music Box for Savage Skulls," by **Doug Moench** and **Kevin Nowlan,** as **MOON KNIGHT** tries to figure out the connection between a street gang and a harmless-looking music box

The search for **Roberto Da Costa's** mother, slated to commence in **NEW MUTANTS #5,** will instead begin in #7 (hang in there, mom). Instead, issues #5 and #6 will contain a two parter, pencilled by **Sal Buscema** and inked by **Bob McLeod.** This will allow **Bob,** normally the penciller, to catch up on the series while maintaining the look of the book through **Bob's** talented inks. Also, issue #6 will launch plot threads involving the **SILVER SAMURAI** and **WOLVERINE's** fiancee, **MARIKO,** that will lead into **X-MEN #172. X-MEN #172,** by the way, will begin the group's trip to Japan that is expected to culminate in **LOGAN** and **MARIKO's** wedding in #175.

While we will never knowingly print inaccurate information in these pages, Marvel Comics reserves the right to make any changes which may become necessary. We're sorry for any inconvenience this may cause.

—The Bullpen

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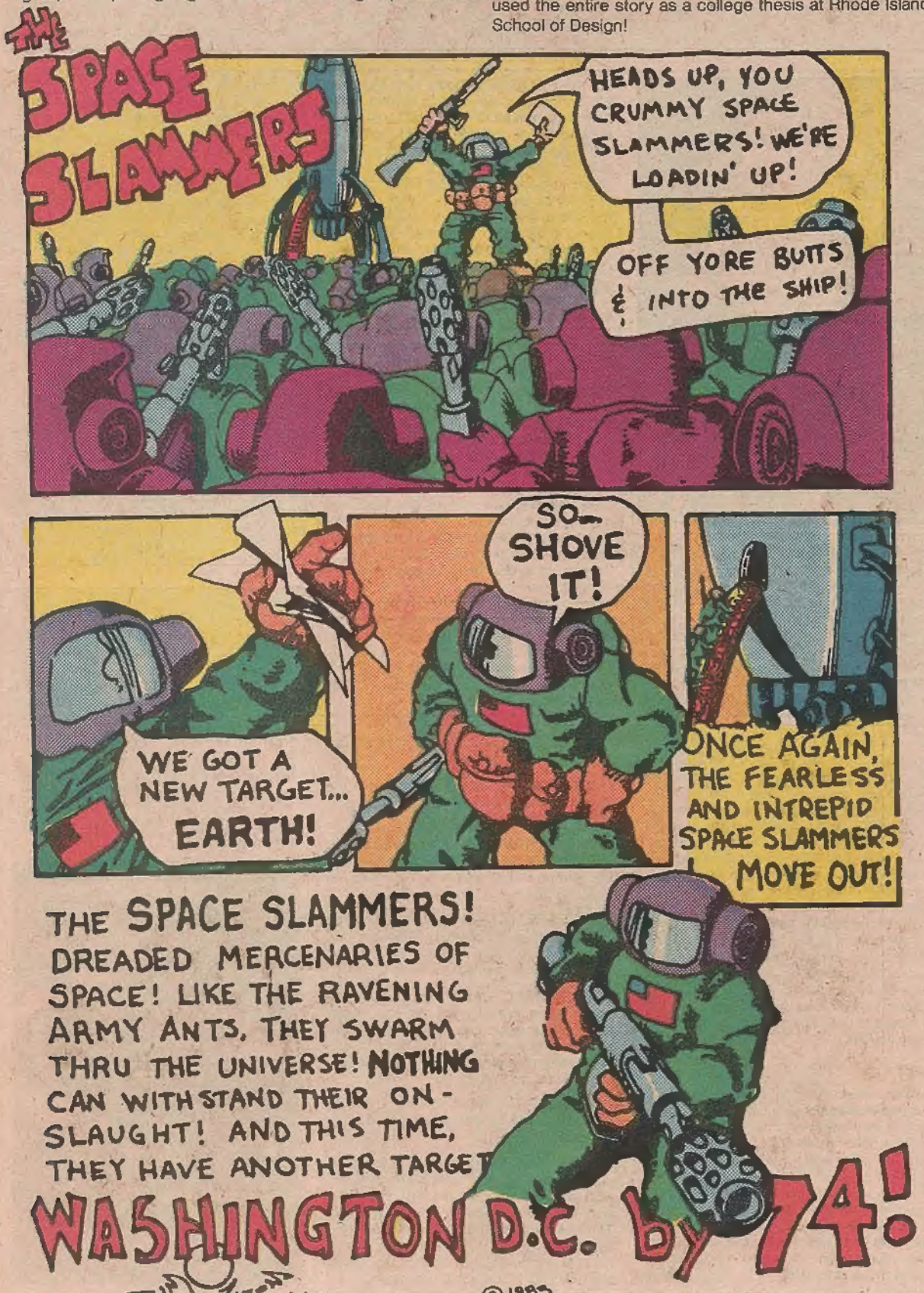
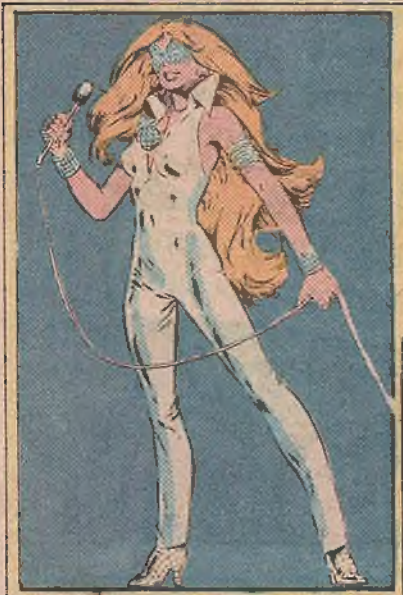
Marvel's new graphic novel, THE STAR SLAMMERS, had its origins some ten years ago.

Art Student (at the time) Walt Simonson, at the behest of the bidding committee for the 1974 World Science Fiction Convention wrote and drew the adventures of a group of Space-going mercenaries. The group, called "The Space Slammers," would blast their way through a series of pamphlets and program books and symbolize the enthusiasm with which the group approached the convention in Washington, D.C.

Not only was the series a smashing success, but Walt used the entire story as a college thesis at Rhode Island School of Design!


THE SPACE SLAMMERS
HEADS UP, YOU CRUMMY SPACE SLAMMERS! WE'RE LOADIN' UP!
OFF YORE BUTTS & INTO THE SHIP!
SO— SHOVE IT!
WE GOT A NEW TARGET... EARTH!
ONCE AGAIN, THE FEARLESS AND INTREPID SPACE SLAMMERS MOVE OUT!
THE SPACE SLAMMERS! DREADED MERCENARIES OF SPACE! LIKE THE RAVENING ARMY ANTS, THEY SWARM THRU THE UNIVERSE! NOTHING CAN WITHSTAND THEIR ON-SLAUGHT! AND THIS TIME, THEY HAVE ANOTHER TARGET!
WASHINGTON D.C. by 74!
4-1-74
©1985

NEWS WATCH



For those of you who thought that the art of **Bill Sienkiewicz** was lost to us due to his departure from **MOON KNIGHT** (now in the capable hands of **Kevin Nowlan**), you can think again. In addition to planning a **THOR** Graphic Novel, **Bill** is hard at work on a series of painted covers for **DAZZLER** that can only be described as well dazzling. Does this mean that **DAZZLER** will be turning into the **Mr. Bill** show? Not hardly, for **Frank Springer** (who turned in a dynamite showing in the recent marathon) will extend his creative reign on that series —**Frank** will be writing as well as penciling the adventures of the melodic mutant.

For those of you following **THE OFFICIAL HANDBOOK OF THE MARVEL UNIVERSE** (and who hasn't been), you may have noticed an interesting phenomenon. Since the **HANDBOOK** is supposed to be the definitive version of **Marvel** 1983, those of you who are alert enough are able to pick up on future plot developments. For example, Volume 1 depicted **Kitty Pride** as **Ariel**, although she did not assume that identity until **X-MEN #168**. In the membership listing of **THE AVENGERS**, two new members were listed who were not official **AVENGERS** at the time—**CAPTAIN MARVEL II**, and **Eros** of Titan a.k.a. **STARFOX**. Furthermore, in the "D" volume, several new members were listed for THE DEFENDERS and are slated to join in issue#125, still some months away. Speaking of the aforementioned new DEFENDERS, how many of you have been astute enough to notice the pattern emerging with the new members, namely **ICEMAN**, the **ANGEL**, the **BEAST**, and **MOONDRAGON** (a female with mind powers). According to scripter **J.M. (Mark) DeMatteis**, **CYCLOPS** might even do a guest shot. Will we actually be seeing the **EX-X-MEN**? What do *you* think?

It's the Marvel Age of subtle crossovers. Case in point—**Denny O'Neil**, scripting both **IRON MAN** and **DAREDEVIL**, realized that he had two stories, both calling for a scene at a party with a tipsy woman. Why not make it the same scene, he reasoned. Why not indeed? Therefore we suggest you check out DAREDEVIL #196 and, three weeks later, IRON MAN #171 for the most offbeat bit of continuity you're likely to see for a while.

And now for something completely different —**PETER PARKER #78** features the most unexpected cover of all. The logo is in one piece! Yes, **THE SPECTACULAR SPIDER-MAN** logo is not sliced, diced, folded, spindled, mutilated or deformed in any way, even though the recent covers have been enthusiastically received by fandom at large for their daring and creativity. When editor **Tom DeFalco**, overseer of the ingenious covers, not to mention the sideways **FANTASTIC FOUR #252**, was asked why he opted for a straightforward logo, he said, "I just wanted to do something completely off the wall."

Marvel will be producing an adaptation, in Super-Special format only, of OCTOPUSSY, the new Roger Moore JAMES BOND flick. The title is scheduled to be on sale in late May.

Last issue we announced the advent of a new title, **THE MYSTERIONS**, which was to be a toy tie-in shipping in February. Alas, the Mysterions will remain Mysterious—the toy company folded and the title was dropped, making it undoubtedly the shortest-lived series on record.

We are pleased to announce several new additions to the Marvel Staff. **Lea Sapp** will be assisting direct sales manager **Carol Kalish** as press representative and fan liaison for Marvel Comics. **Lea** has considerable publicity and design background which will be put to good use in her new position. Previously **Lea** had been Administrative Assistant to **Jim Shooter**, a slot that is generally considered to be destined for greatness since so many previous occupants of the position have moved up in rank. Replacing **Lea** on the front line will be **Lynn Cohen**, who in turn will be aided and abetted by **Margaret Clark**. Both are long time fans of both science fiction and comics. Those two ladies are on the front lines when it comes to public contact for Marvel, so go easy on 'em.

We are also pleased to announce the hiring of **Bob Budiansky** as a full time editor. Old timers may remember that **Bob** was an assistant editor a few years back—newcomers will know his pencilling work from the soon-to-be-gone-but-not-forgotten **GHOST RIDER**. Assisted by **Michael Higgins**, a long-time **Marvel** freelancer, Bob and Michael will be in charge of a host of new projects and limited series that will be coming your way in 1983 and 1984. At this point these consist of:

BLACK PANTHER—Limited series by Jim Shooter and Denys Cowan.

DAZZLER & THE BEAST—Beauty and the Beast, if you prefer, a limited series, pencilled by Don Perlin.

X-MEN/MICRONAUTS—A four-issue limited series, co-scripted by **Chris Claremont** and **Bill Mantlo**, and probably pencilled by **Butch Guice**.

JACK OF HEARTS—Limited series scripted by **Bill Mantlo**, pencilled by **Rick Leonardi** of **VISION/SCARLET WITCH** fame (good luck with **JACK**'s costume, **Rick**!)

ROCK AND RULE—Adaptation of an animated film about an aging rock-star who, determined to produce the ultimate spectacle, summons forth a demon. It will be produced in the same manner as the **FIRE & ICE** book, using actual cels of the film.

HERCULES—The return of the Olympian god as viewed by **Bob Layton** in another miniseries.

REPRINT BOOKS—Reprinting, in the high-quality format that has made **WARLOCK** and **RED NAILS** such hits, the **KREE/SKRULL** war from **AVENGERS**, written by **Roy Thomas** and pencilled by **Neal Adams**; and the early Moench/Sienkiewicz MOON KNIGHT stories that ran as back up in THE RAMPAGING HULK some years ago.

GRAPHIC NOVELS—**THOR** by Jim Shooter and Bill Sienkiewicz; **THE HULK** by **Jim Shooter**, **Brett Blevins** and **Vince Colletta**; and **SUPERBOXERS** (formerly "Superfighters"), concept and art by **Ron Wilson**, scripted by **John Byrne**, and inked by **Armando Gil**.

ALPHA FLIGHT

by Patrick O'Neill

At times, it seems as though John Byrne's career at Marvel has consisted of taking over characters created by others . . . and turning them into fan favorites: *Power Man/Iron Fist*, the *Fantastic Four*, and, of course, the *X-Men*. But it was in the pages of the *X-Men* that Byrne designed his own superhero team—Alpha Flight. And now, as Byrne prepares to debut the Canadian heroes in their own book (first issue scheduled for release in May 1983), we talked about Alpha Flight—who they are, where they come from, what they'll be doing.

MARVEL AGE: Who are the members of Alpha Flight?

JOHN BYRNE: I may be making this up as we speak—

VINDICATOR—James McDonald Hudson, unemployed engineer. As of the second issue, his name will be *Guardian*, which is the name he had when I first created him. We don't have the Guardians of the Galaxy to worry about anymore, so he can have his real name back. I never cared for "Vindicator" anyway. As far as I'm concerned, Canada doesn't have anything to vindicate.

He's married. His wife is Heather McNeil Hudson. His battle suit, as Chris Claremont dubbed it, works almost like an artificial Magneto. It gives him localized control of the electro-magnetic field of the earth. This gives him the ability to fly, and to lift objects by negating gravitational effects. It also gives him the ability to render himself at rest, relative to the turning of the earth, which is how he does that disappearing trick of his, by suddenly taking off westward at a thousand miles an hour.

He's about the most straight-laced of the group, the most straightforward. He was the main mover and shaker behind the creation of Alpha Flight, so the apparent disbanding of the team at the end of their last *X-Men* appearance, and at the beginning of their own title, obviously hit him harder than anyone else. He's kind of a reluctant superhero, though; he didn't really want the job himself. He'd rather be behind the lines, making suggestions, rather than be on the front lines. He doesn't see himself in that role, but he does the best he can in it.

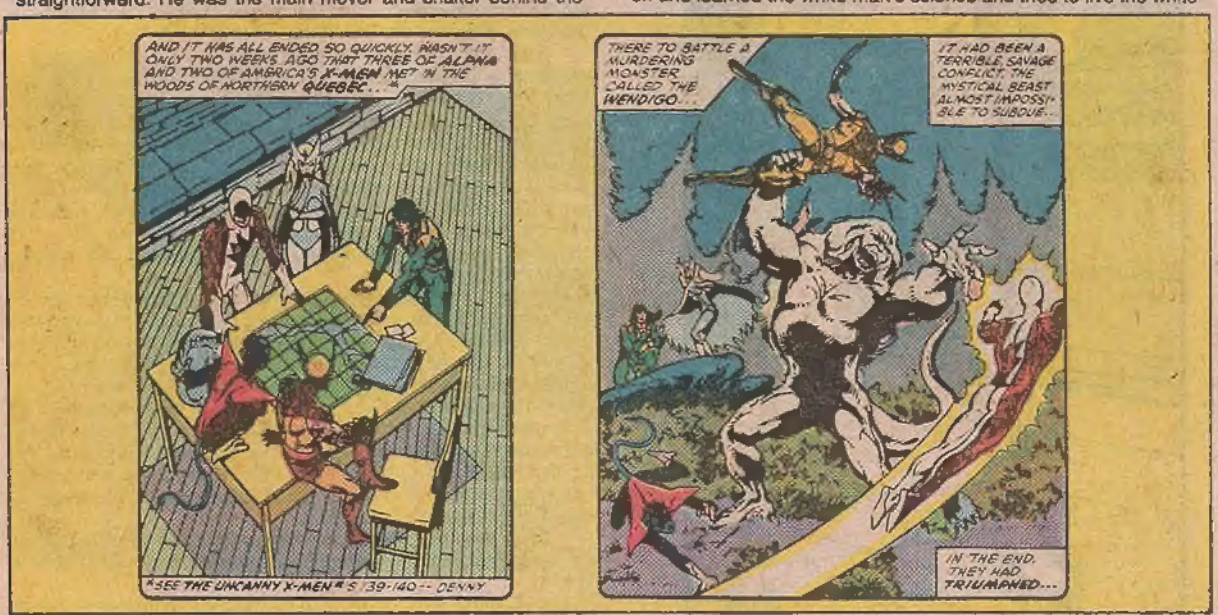
SASQUATCH—Walter Lankowski, biochemist, biophysicist. He was a professor at McGill University in Quebec the first time we saw him. He has since moved back to British Columbia, which is the province he is from. He now teaches at Simon Fraser University. He got through college on a football scholarship and played professional football for a while.

He got the way he is, deliberately, when he decided to see what would happen if the conditions to which Bruce Banner was exposed were done under more controlled circumstances. So he built himself a gamma-ray generating machine way up north and bombarded himself with gamma rays—much the same way David Banner did in the *Hulk* TV series.

MA: Why isn't he green?

JB: He's orange because there was a particularly high sunspot activity at the time, so he picked up some cosmic rays, as well. He got zapped by the Aurora Borealis, basically.

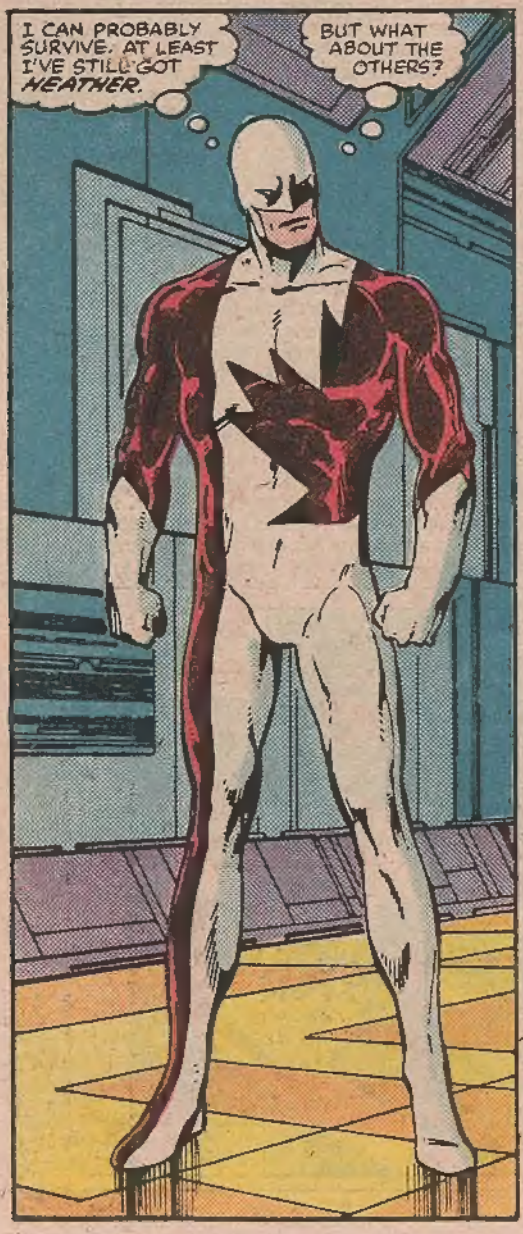
SHAMAN—Dr. Michael Twoyoungmen, physician. He's the chief staff doctor on the Sarcee Reserve Hospital, outside of Calgary. Basically, he is a man who has returned to his heritage. He went off and learned the white man's science and tried to live the white


AND IT HAS ALL ENDED SO QUICKLY, HASN'T IT. ONLY TWO WEEKS AGO THAT THREE OF ALPHA AND TWO OF AMERICA'S X-MEN MET IN THE WOODS OF NORTHERN QUEBEC...
*SEE THE UNCANNY X-MEN #'S 139-140 -- DENNY
THERE TO BATTLE A MURDERING MONSTER CALLED THE WENDIGO...
IT HAD BEEN A TERRIBLE, SAVAGE CONFLICT. THE MYSTICAL BEAST ALMOST IMPOSSIBLE TO SUBDUE...
IN THE END, THEY HAD TRIUMPHED...

man's life. And, much like Doctor Strange, he discovered there were things in this world that you simply cannot deal with from that direction. He went back and learned what his grandfather had always tried to encourage him to learn—the ways of the medicine chief. He became the second most powerful medicine chief ever to come along, the first most powerful being his grandfather, who is now dead, and who still communicates with Shaman in times of great need.

If you want to sum it up . . . he's Doctor Strange—but he does it with potions and herbs and little dolls and stuff, instead of just doing it with the power of his mind, the way Strange does. This possibly gives Shaman a slight advantage, I don't know. If he has the tools at hand, he can make just about anything. I don't know if Strange has that kind of power over the physical world.

NORTHSTAR—Jean-Paul Beaubier, ski champion, and *AURORA* Jean-Marie Beaubier, teacher. They are twins, who were separated shortly after their birth, when their parents were killed in an automobile accident. Out of their remaining relatives, there was no one who could reasonably take on the task of raising both children, so Jean-Paul went with one group, and Jean-Marie went with another. Jean-Marie wound up being raised and educated in a Catholic school by nuns, while Jean-Paul ended up being raised in a much more open and free environment—so their personalities were molded very differently. They did not know about each other until Hudson discovered them. Independently he discovered this fast lady, and this fast guy, and realized they were related when he brought them together.



The first time they shook hands they discovered the additional power they didn't know they had—the blinding bright light they can generate.

They are mutants—and as the fans will discover in the first issue in great detail, Aurora is not a very healthy lady, psychologically. Jean-Marie and Aurora are two very different people. Jean-Marie does not like Aurora at all. She looks upon Aurora as something that possesses her.

MA: That's interesting. There's no real *physical* transformation. Just putting on a costume changes her personality?

JB: Yeah. She turns into another person, altogether. And Jean-Paul is very worried about that.

SNOWBIRD—Anne McKenzie, RCMP officer. She has the ability to turn into any arctic beast, which covers a lot of territory. There are a lot of animals that are native to the far north. If she changes into something which would ordinarily be smaller than she, about 108 pounds, she generally turns into a 108-pound version of that thing. For example, if she turns into a rabbit, it would come out as a 108-pound rabbit. If she turns into something larger, like a polar bear, she picks up the extra mass from somewhere and becomes a full-sized bear.

We're saved from explaining where that extra mass comes from—since Snowbird has the advantage of all sorts of mystical stuff to back her up. We don't have to worry about physics. Snowbird is not a human being. As established in the first issue, Anne McKenzie is no more her true form, and Snowbird is no more her true form, than are the beasts she changes into.

She is a half-breed, at best. Her mother was Nelvanna, a goddess, and her father was a mortal. As I'm now creating the story, her mother is imprisoned in a realm beyond our comprehension. On a special occasion, she was able to break out of her confinement, without powers, and mate with a human—in order to have an offspring who would have powers; although those powers are not as great as a goddess's. This was a desperate attempt to get a force into the world that would almost equate with Nelvanna's, which is at least temporarily removed from the world. Nelvanna, by the way, is a "real" Eskimo goddess. We're doing real mythology again.

MARRINA— no other name. She's an alien, although she doesn't know that yet. I don't want to talk about her overmuch—because issues 2, 3, and 4 are almost totally concerned with who and what Marrina is. Her powers are that she is a water-breather. She's amphibious—she can exist on land, as far as I'm concerned, permanently—she has no "one-hour" weakness, or anything like that. One other trick she can pull—she is able to swim underwater at great speed and twirl around, and thus generate a kind of vortex, so that when she breaks the surface, it creates a waterspout, which can be used to carry her great distances. About three miles, we've established that as a limit.

Other than that, there's nothing spectacular about her. She'll be there mostly for the strangeness that goes with who and what she is.

PUCK—Eugene Judd, bouncer. A normal man, in the sense that he doesn't have any superpowers. Abnormal, in that he's three-fool-

six and weighs about two hundred pounds. The analogy I'm using is that he's a six-foot-six man from whom three feet have been edited out. He's about as broad as he is tall. He is a super-fighter—trained in kung fu, savate, and anything else that comes along. He's real good at it. He's called Puck because of his tendency to do cartwheels and spin around rooms, and crash into things. He wears a black costume with a "P" on the chest.

MA: Where do these characters come from? What is the whole genesis of the group—and what direction are you going to take with the series?

JB: OK—genesis: that depends on how far back you want to go.

MA: Go back as far as you want.

JB: Two of them started as fan characters, back in the before-time, when I was in college. Vindicator started as a character called Guardian, as I've said, who looked a whole lot like Captain Canuck—who had not yet appeared. So when Vindicator finally appeared in the *X-Men* he had to have his costume completely revamped so he *wouldn't* look like Captain Canuck. And Snowbird started as a villain in a humorous strip that I was doing for the college newspaper at the time. She sort of got reformed, got a new costume and a whole new *raison d'etre*, and took off from there.

The rest of them were created more or less to be counters to the X-men that they were going to have to fight. I put in Sasquatch because we needed a big strong guy to go up against Colossus, and I put in Shaman because we needed a weather controller to go up against Storm. He was originally just a weather controller, and his powers just sort of spread out as the story happened. The twins, Northstar and Aurora, because of Nightcrawler's teleporting powers, and everybody having flying powers, we needed somebody who could fly and could move fast—and I thought twins would be fun. I hadn't really worked with twins before, and at that point I'd forgotten that Quicksilver and the Scarlet Witch are twins.

So, two of them go way back . . . and the rest happened almost as I drew that first issue they appeared in. Especially Shaman—I didn't know anything about him until I actually started to draw him.

MA: What about the new characters?

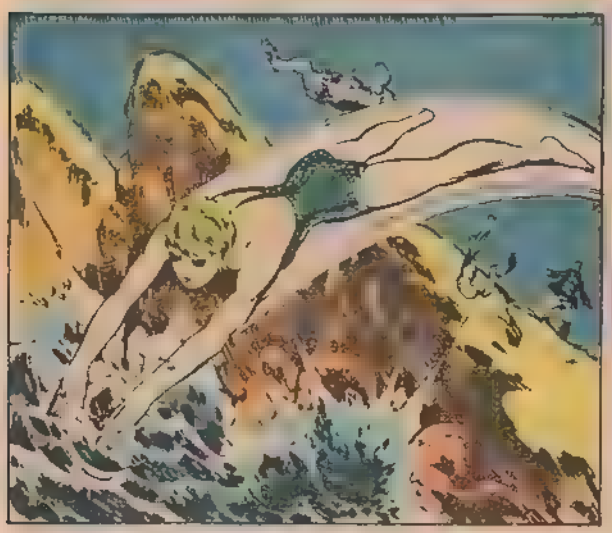
JB: Well, the two new characters came about when I decided that the thrust of the book would be a kind of "Mission: Impossible" set-up. Vindicator would pick whoever was suitable for the mission. I decided that since they weren't all going to be cosmic missions, and they weren't always going to be going up against Doctor Doom, we'd need at least one character who was just an ordinary guy. And I also decided that since the rest of the group was more or less representative of the provinces of Canada (or at least the regions of Canada), I needed somebody from the Maritimes. I decided to make that one a water-breather.

They were also created to expand, to give me a greater pool to draw from. Eight characters is easier to juggle in a "Mission: Impossible" situation than six.

MA: So the direction of the series will be along the lines of *Mission: Impossible*. Are they still going to be connected to the Canadian government?

JB: No, they're completely independent now.

MA: Then how does Vindicator choose the missions?



AND AS THAT SWIRLING COLUMN OF WATER ARCS INLAND, CONVERGING ON THE SAME CO-ORDINATES, WE FIND...
COME, BROTHER, WHY MUST WE DAWDLE ALONG AT THIS SNAIL'S PACE?
CONSERVE YOUR STRENGTH, SISTER. WE DO NOT KNOW WHAT MENACE HAS CAUSED VINDICATOR TO SUMMON US.

JB: He's centrally located and he has an unofficial/official government liaison, who when something does not present itself obviously to Vindicator, this guy will serve to call up and say, as he does in the first issue, "Check the CBC News. There's something happening here," or "We'd sure like it if you guys would take a glance at thus-and-such a thing." And then Vindicator will pick whoever is suitable for whatever mission and off they'll go and fight the bad guys.

Beyond that, for all intents and purposes, they're simply working out of Vindicator's living room. I establish in the first issue that he has a computer set-up that he sort of boot-legged for himself so that he could get into contact with Alpha Flight, the other members, whenever he needs them. It'll go from that. I hope every issue won't be a case of Vindicator saying, "Come and do this." Since each of them has his or her own life, off wherever it is that they are, it's obvious that just as big bad guys come to the Hulk, big bad guys will come to Sasquatch. He doesn't have to work through Vindicator. That will just be the basic premise. In emergency situations, I can just say, "OK—Vindicator will call them in on this," but they will also have stories that happen just to themselves.

MA: When you were developing the whole concept of Alpha Flight, for their original guest shot in the *X-Men*, did you think that, being a Canadian, you wanted to do a Canadian team?

JB: It wasn't my idea. Way back, when I first started on the *X-Men*, they had been kicking around the idea that the Canadian government had probably spent an awful lot of money on Wolverine, especially if he had adamantium bones. It would seem logical, then, that he couldn't just pack up and leave, as he'd apparently done. In fact, I think Len Wein, right from the start, was planning on

doing a story where a Canadian superhero would come and try to get Wolverine back. So when I took over the *X-Men*, it just seemed natural that this story should finally happen, now that there was a Canadian working on the book.

We got sufficient popular response, and I certainly enjoyed creating Vindicator enough, that when the opportunity to establish that there were more than just him presented itself, we took it.

MA: Do you expect to get more public and press response to Alpha Flight in Canada—as there was when Prime Minister Trudeau made a cameo in the *X-Men*?

JB: There has not been a great deal of response to Alpha Flight in Canada, as far as letters or reactions at conventions. The major positive response has been in the United States, which is what I think inspires us to give them their own book. If it were going to be a smash hit only in Canada, it wouldn't be worth it. I think the group's real popularity lies not with Canadian fans but with American fans, possibly because they are, I don't know, slightly exotic, being Canadian. That's foreign, and therefore out of the ordinary, to the American fan. I don't deny that we're trying to stimulate that same kind of response we had before. I do have a one-panel, throwaway flashback with Trudeau in it, just to see if we can get people looking at the book again. I'm hoping that if it is noticed, there will be a popular reaction—possibly in the press—but, hopefully, among the fans in Canada, to the fact that there's now a regular Canadian book. I just hope it won't be expected to be too definitive, because I'm making a comic-book version of Canada, just as the United States in Marvel Comics is a comic-book version of the United States.

MA: Will there be X-men cameos and guest shots, to help attract that fan segment to the new book?

JB: Very, very briefly. There's a two-panel flashback. The first issue does not take place *now*. It takes place immediately after Alpha Flight's last appearance in the *X-Men* . . . in Marvel time, a couple of months ago . . in real time, five years ago. So there's a flashback to what happened only a week ago as far as Vindicator's concerned, to their battle with Wendigo. Nightcrawler and Wolverine will appear, but only for two panels. The second issue catches us up to "regular" Marvel time . . . and we are planning in the future on trying to get Wolverine to come and stay with the group for a while.

MA: You will be responsible for writing, pencilling and inking *Alpha Flight* as well as *Fantastic Four*, not to mention scripting *The Thing*. How will you be able to handle all these art chores on a monthly basis without losing quality?

JB: I'm going to be eliminating a step—I'm going to be doing just breakdowns and then inking those—pencilling with ink. I've reached a level of comfort with my own work that I don't need to do full pencils. So I'll just be doing stick figures, layouts, and inking those. It sounds like a lot of work but it actually isn't. Although (evil laugh) I'll still be making just as much money because Marvel pays me for a completed page.

MA: Why did you decide to spread out the homes of the various Alpha Flight members?

JB: It just seemed to me that in a country as vast as Canada, it would be highly unlikely if all the characters started in Ottawa, let's say, or in Toronto. To spread them out simply seemed more logical. Since Canada is so very strongly regional—the west is the west, Quebec is Quebec, and the Maritimes are the Maritimes—and they all have their own very distinct identities, it was logical that the characters should represent those identities. Someone like Sasquatch, if for no other reason than the name, should be from somewhere out in the British Columbia area, where they supposedly have Sasquatch. Some of them *have* to be French, obviously; and as I said, in the new version we felt the need to have somebody from the Maritimes, so I came up with Marina.

MA: What is the type of adversary Alpha Flight will be coming up against?

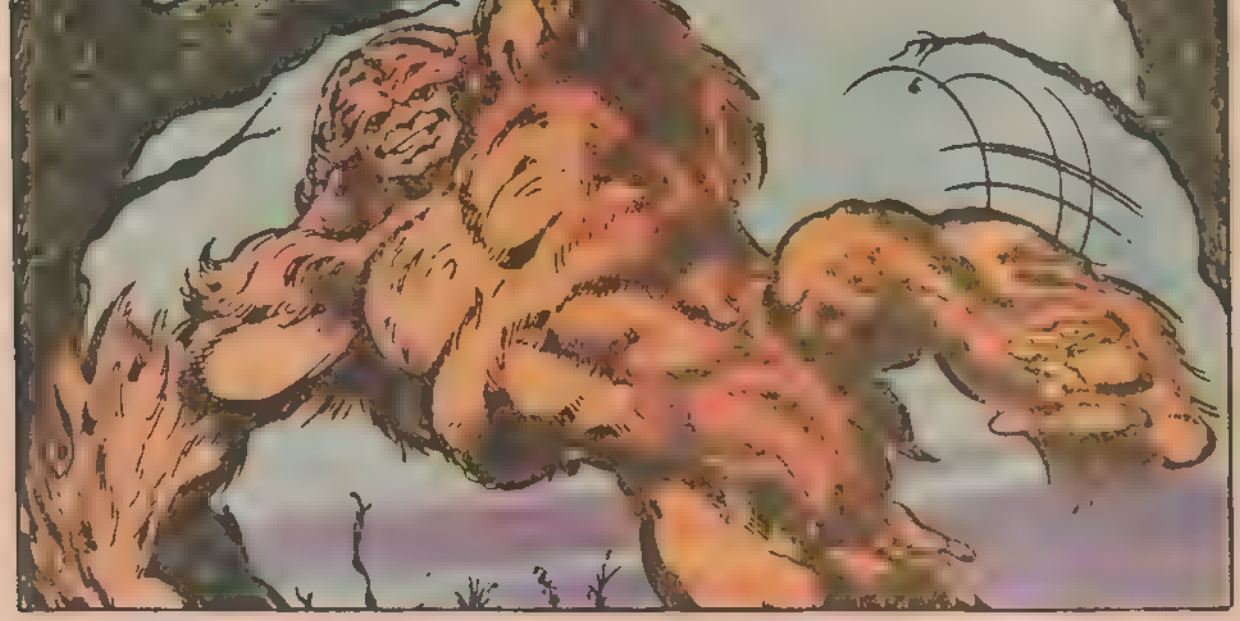
JB: In the first issue, they battle a mystical earth-monster called Tundra, which is this walking land-mass. It's sort of one with the land, so that if they destroy it too quickly, the whole country will fall apart around it. In issues two through four we are creating a kind of Doctor Doom for Alpha Flight—a character specifically created to fill that role, called the Overlord.

Beyond those guys, I'm hoping to bring in some of the more familiar villains from the Marvel Universe. Also, as we go along, the personalities and powers of the characters will suggest the kind of villains they should fight. Obviously, we're not going to set Puck up against the Hulk, anymore than we'd set Sasquatch against Pastepot Pete.

MA: A question I've had since the team's first appearance: Why are they called Alpha Flight?

JB: They're called Alpha Flight because there are also a Beta and a Gamma Flight. What we had is Department H, which was the superhero-developing arm of the Canadian Ministry of Defense. Alpha Flight are the guys out in the field. Beta Flight are the ones at maximum training, almost ready for Alpha Flight. That's where Puck and Marina come from. And we have Gamma Flight, who are the ones who are under development. In issue one, we get a good look at Beta Flight and Gamma Flight—but we don't tell you anything about any of them.

The reason they continue to be called Alpha Flight is: As they're all standing around at the end of the first issue, saying, "Well, if we're going to stick together, what are we gonna call ourselves?"—Puck basically grabs Hudson by the throat and says, "Listen, I busted my buns to be in Alpha Flight—I wanna be in *Alpha Flight*!" So they agree Alpha Flight is a reasonably good



BEHIND THE LINES

TAKE MANHATTAN... PLEASE!

Ralph Macchio

I don't like New York City. I want that statement on-record now and forevermore, lest anyone believe my seven years of labor in the Big Apple have softened my attitude toward the wretched place. And while we're at it, let me clear up a misconception. All the horrible things you've heard about this city — they're true. It's dirty, congested and crime-ridden. Yes, I do have to work here, but that's as far as I want my involvement with Fun City to go. Give me a split-level personal transportation, swimming pool and a barbeque pit. That's my idea of the good life, and I make no apologies for it. New Yorkers can keep their "stimulating" lifestyle and cultural advantages. BLEAH!

What exactly does this petty diatribe have to do with comics you're wondering.

Plenty. Y'see, much of what I learned about New York when I was a lad in the wilds of Creeskill, New Jersey, (yes, *Jersey*) was derived from my reading of Marvel Comics. What I had envisioned to be a dull, drab landscape, became a wondrous fantasy-land of colorful super-heroes swinging from rooftops, and menacing super-villains lurking in those ubiquitous abandoned warehouses. Marvel's Manhattan was alive in stunning diversity. Jack Kirby's towering buildings in FANTASTIC FOUR were uniquely Kirby. They were massive and overwhelming, yet, architecturally, I was reminded of structures from the past rather than present-day. Jack's New York was usually bright, sunlit and its details accessible to the probing eye. As a kid, I felt comfortable there, despite the Skrulls on every streetcorner.

Ditko's New York was, as everything with Ditko, something different. Here, the streets through which Spider-Man prowled were dimly-lit and shadowy. There was more evil in what was suggested than what was shown. But much as these gloomy exteriors frightened me, they fascinated me, as well. I was nuts over the ever-present water towers, jutting chimneys and bizarre skylights. Hey, to a youngster from the scrubbed-clean suburbs, such everyday urban sights were alien as anything in Tolkien. And if you threw in these strangely costumed characters cavorting all over this fascinating landscape, you had one fine fantasy world going.

Today, artists, such as Frank Miller (DAREDEVIL) and Bill Sienkiewicz (MOONKNIGHT) also use the city as an ad-

ing it a simple backdrop. Once again

the Eternal Struggle is played out upon a canvas of brick and concrete. It's the only locale where Spider-Man, Daredevil and others in Marvel's New York could really exist.

So, as the song says, you keep Manhattan. I'll take the Kirby/Ditko/Miller/Sienkiewicz City. That's *my* kind of town.

NO CRAZY AFTER ALL THESE YEARS

The absolute last issue of CRAZY magazine has been shipped out to the printers. After ninety four erratic dispersals to the august distributors of America yet another humor rag has trundled off to that periodical pulp-mill paradise in the sky (or is it on the banks of the Passaic River). I was sorry to see it go. I'm not sorry that I was at it's helm for almost four years. Editing CRAZY was the ultimate wish-fulfillment for a kid who grew up idolizing Kurtzman, Elder, Wood and Davis: The adolescent who was com-

magazine because he was sure that something that funny had to be proscribed; The teenager who couldn't make up his mind whether he was buying "Playboy" for the centerfolds or for "Little Annie Fanny" pages in the back; The young cartoonist starting out in undergrounds wondering how Crumb got that good; The working pro who switched over to super-heroes and barbarians strictly for economic reasons...

So there I was, I had spent a year toiling in the stainless-steel canyons of Ad Ave, following the "implosion" that had jettisoned Al Milgrom and I from the warm and cheery corridors of the Honorable Competition. One uneventful Tuesday Al calls me up for a lunch and armed with a free meal and a pitcher of Sangria he convinces me to talk to the "Tall Fella" about getting a new desk to prop my sneakers on.

After another free lunch, I inherit a magazine that nobody has bothered to look at in six years. I spend a month calling up every Ha-ha and Yock man I've had the fortune to run into during ten odd years of dragging a portfolio around from one disinterested art director to another. The response is gratifying. There are a lot of funny people out there looking for work. Pretty soon our list of contributors takes on the semblance of a National Lampoon Alumni Society. Bobby London, Gary Haligren, Ralph Reese, Al Kupperberg, Mimi Pond, Paul Kirchner, Bob Larkin and Mary Wilshire. These were all tried and true bankable talents. Respected names, so-on and so forth... The real surprise was what came

clutching tattered manuscripts and frayed art samples. Fresh, young minds with novel ideas and untried styles. Off-the-wall, irreverent, arch, not always lucid, paranoid, schizzed out, hairy, pseudo-intellectual, clever

gate a flood of hate mail. Bob Camp, Steve Mellor, Mike Carlin and Dick Codor typify this crowd. They are all going on to bigger and better things. Watch out, You'll see a lot more of them in the future.

All in all, I had a great old time. I had the opportunity to work with a lot of talented people who are too numerous to mention here, but what the heck... Should I? Would you just skip over them and proceed to Mark

alds graduate thesis on the death of Spider-Woman? (I peeked.) Should I bury the name of the next Marvel Super Hero slated to die in the middle of the list? Is anyone who reads this magazine at all anal-retentive enough to finish every article he/she/it starts? What is the unified field theory? Are you paying attention? I begin; Thank you, Jim Owsley. A true treasure of a managing editor, a funny guy, a promising writer and many other totally embarassing things that almost make up for the fact that he can't sing or dance worth a plug nickel; Joe Albelo. An art director without hypertension or pretensions towards "real Art" Rare? You bet; Marie Severin. Token white person and best

ble, Dave Morris, Paul Kupperberg, Ned Sonntag, Virgil Diamond, Steve Smallwood and that monument to the yock trade, The walking breathing personification of Ob-

Man Who Needs No Introduction, The Right Honorable Steve Skeates, wherever he is...

Again, thanks to everyone and my apologies to anyone I've managed to leave out. Hope we can put out another yock rag in the future.

TRULY BIZARRE

Denny O'Neil

Long time readers of *Bizarre Adventures* (all six of them) have undoubtedly saue 34, our special hate-

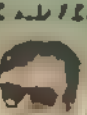
mber, the magazine's format changed. Drastically. Instead of being big and black-and-white, the mag was little and in full color. The reason is that nobody was

months, it has featured original work by John Byrne, Frank Miller, Neal Adams, Archie Goodwin, Michael Golden, Wendy Pini, John Buscema, Larry Hama, Chris Claremont and literally dozens of other very talented people — including Stephen King. Yes, *that* Stephen King.

No matter. I might as well have published work by my mailman. Nobody notices *Bizarre Adventures*. Within the past two months I've visited comics shops in Berkley, San Francisco, Hollywood and, of course, New York City and in none of these estimable establishments was BizAd displayed in the new arrivals section, nor with the other non-superhero stuff. Listen, it is a bit discouraging.

Most folks wouldn't know BizAd even *with* an American Express card.

Dunno 1983, we'll be doing three issues — little and in color, but with the kind of content the faithful half dozen come to relish.



DENNIS J. O'NEIL

BEHIND THE LINES

STRAIGHT SHOOTING

Jim Shooter

Early last summer, I ran a notice in my "Shooter's Page" column in *Marvel Fanfare* #4 announcing that I welcomed submissions from talented people whose skills were up to professional levels. To date, I've received over 10,000 responses, and a score of those applicants had been given trial assignments.

There has been much speculation about my "talent search". Many fans have wondered why Marvel "suddenly" was desperate for a wave of new creators. "Desperate"? No. As I said in the original announcement, our business is booming and there's room for some new, star-quality talent. And, as for "suddenly"

When I was first hired by Marvel Comics as Associate Editor (a position which was then second-in-command to the Editor in Chief) back in 1976, I discovered to my horror, that the official procedure for dealing with submissions was a.) to *ignore* them, which explained why there was a five-foot high stack of them lying unopened in a corner of the editorial office, b.) to *throw them away* unopened and unanswered, which explained why the five-foot high stack wasn't fifty feet high, or, c.) occasionally, when some assistant or secretary had time, to return a few of them along with a form letter which said, approximately, that Marvel did not look at submissions, and that we only used our own staff of creative people, so no others need apply. Also, at conventions and public appearances, it was policy for the office staff to tell people that no one ever got comics work by sending in unsolicited samples! Prospective creators were advised to seek work at Charlton or at other "little publishers." Once they had "paid their dues" at the "second string houses" they might be considered. It was intimated that it was helpful to know someone on the "inside". And, those days it probably was.

I couldn't believe it. First of all, most of the people I knew, myself included, had gotten work at the major comics houses by sending in unsolicited samples. Second, I couldn't bring myself to treat anyone's samples so shoddily.

Though I was working many hours of overtime every week trying to get the comics back on schedule, still, every night I took home half a dozen or more envelopes from that pile of submissions and wrote responses – often detailed critiques to the senders. The other guys on staff thought I was crazy, or maybe a masochist.

Eventually, I got to the bottom of that pile, and I've stayed more or less current ever since. Even after I became Editor in Chief in 1978, I still handled the submissions myself – because I felt they were *that* important.

In spite of the fact that almost every single submission since 1976 has been answered reasonably promptly (I must have misplaced a *few* in seven years) and in spite of my telling fans at conventions and personal appearances during those years that submissions were welcomed at Marvel, *still* the common belief among fans was that Marvel refused to look at submissions! I got more letters asking me to make an "exception" and allow the correspondent to submit samples than I got batches of samples!

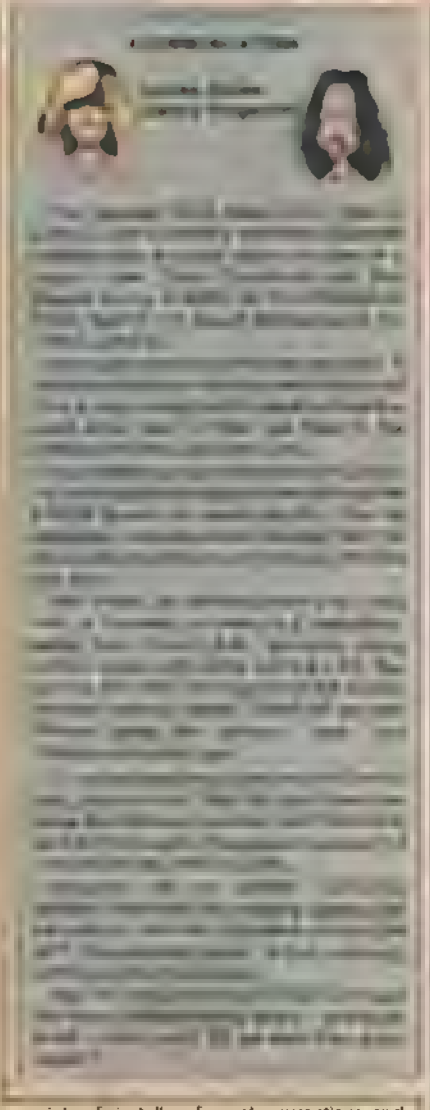
Until last summer, that is. My little column in *Marvel Fanfare* apparently has set the record straight for good.

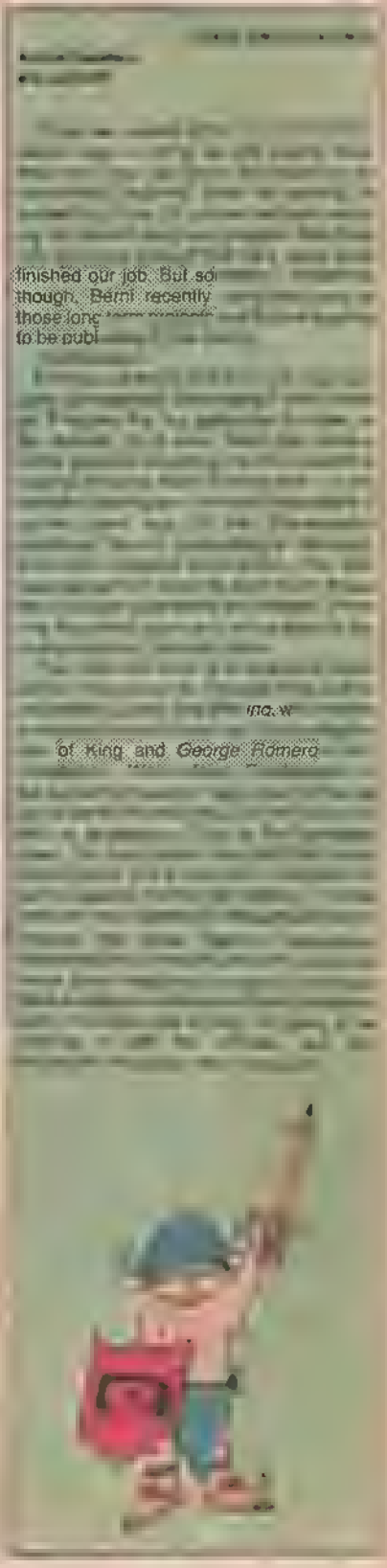
Good.

One *bad* thing about setting the record straight is that the volume of submissions now has made the personal responses and critiques I used to enjoy writing impossible. Unfortunately, I have to send form letters in response to all but the absolute best submissions.

But everyone is read or examined by me, or by whomever it's addressed to.

And that's the way it's going to be as long as I'm around. Thought you'd like to know.





SOMETIMES THE GOOD GUYS LOSE

Mark Gruenwald

"Sometimes The Good Guys Lose." That's not only the title of an old SHIELD story, it's also how I feel this month as we put the finishing touches on the last issue of SPIDER-WOMAN. Spider-Woman, the character, has been near and dear to me ever since I managed to snare the lady as my first writing assignment a few months after joining Marvel as an assistant editor back in '78. Sure, she had the same first name as a certain amazing web-slinger who happens to be Marvel's single most popular character, but it wasn't like she was Spidey's cousin or anything. She was always very much her own character, not only different from Spider-Man, but also different from the other Marvel heroes. At least as I saw her.

Anyway, why do certain potentially good characters and concepts never really catch on and find the audience they need to survive on the newsstands? In Spider-Woman's case, it began with an "image problem": hardcore fan-types were expecting something derivitive, and were very unsympathetic to *anything* we wished to entitle "Spider-Woman." Still, the book never faltered because of lack of enthusiasm or imagination on most of the storytellers' parts. Looking back over the 50 issue run, one can see a modicum of fine effort imparted upon every issue. Could it have been the direction of the series? Perhaps in the various writers' attempts to keep her from resembling Spider-Man, they went too far afield from what makes a good, solid, continuing character? When I wrote her, I wanted to explore the vulnerable side of her personality – the woman who was new to the country, new to making friends, new to finding a job, new to adjusting to her superhuman powers. I found that rather interesting, since most of the other Marvel heroes were firmly ensconsed in their civilian identities and were well-adjusted to the burdens of power. But maybe the series suffered from this seeming directionlessness. Later writers emphasized other aspects of her character, taking the series in other directions. Maybe that hurt, having a different template imposed on the character every twelve issues or so. Whereas other more established Marvel characters could weather a certain amount of floundering, maybe because of Spider-Woman's original spin-off-of-Spider-Man image, readers would not give her as much of a chance.

Maybe (and this is one of our Editor in Chief's contentions) Spider-Woman's origin was hopelessly convoluted, the most difficult to explain in one sentence since Captain Mar-Vell's. Face it, here's a character who first thought she was a mutated spider and not human at all, was a heretofore unseen citizen of Wundagore (the High Evolutionary's scientific retreat), an agent of HYDRA (or at least the European division), a killer of her first boyfriend, a pawn of a demon, and (thank you, Chris Claremont) the Viper's supposed daughter. Sure, a lot of that crap could be trimmed away to simply a normal young girl who got radiation poisoning, underwent strange treatment with irradiated spider-blood, and come out of it with spider-powers. But it's a lot of origin for any reader or writer to have to deal with, even to know which parts to ignore.

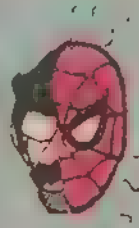
Besides her origin, I think Spider-Woman suffered from having no clear-cut secret identity role. She started out as a sidekick to a SHIELD agent, became a receptionist at a California pop psych clinic, gave up an occupation in her civvies while her costumed self became a mercenary bounty hunter, and finally became a self-employed private detective (a role that also uncomfortably overlapped with her costumed identity). Further, Spider-Woman seemed to develop strange dependent relationships with men she was superior to (SHIELD agent Jerry Hunt, criminologist Scott McDowell, the underworld leader Gamesman, her landlord David Ishima, etc.). Whereas such a human weakness as this could have made interesting reading as she copes with her problem, she never got around to coping with it or even recognizing it as a problem.

So I guess I do know why SPIDER-WOMAN failed: image problems stemming from her name, an overcomplicated origin, no clearly defined personal life, unresolved character flaws, abrupt changes in tone and direction. Hmmm. I still say that beneath all the rubble, there was buried a great character trying to dig free. I even think that the latest creative team had the best shot of any of them to clear the debris and get to the heart of the character. But what a task. The book was a marginal title, one of Marvel's lowest sellers, and had a lot of inertia to overcome. So when it was finally put on the Intended Cancelation List for the umpteenth time, I knew it was time to give up a good fight.

The SPIDER-WOMAN book did not live in vain: every Marvel title, no matter how marginal, has its rabid core of fanatic readers who stick with it through thin and thinner, and are grateful for every issue there was. As for us, I think we can learn from our mistakes and come up with more solid, clearer characters that avoid our web-lady's downfalls. In fact, I bet we could even come up with a Spider-Woman that works. Don't be surprised when we do.

TWISTED TOM'S TWO-FISTED TIPS AND TALES

Tom DeFalco



Heh! Heh! Heh! I hope you're not reading this column to learn all of the upcoming developments in my books. *Forget it!* NO WAY. It's disappointment time again.

I'm not going to discuss the major decision Peter Parker must make in AMAZING SPIDER-MAN #243 or the way it will permanently begin to affect his life in AMAZING #244. (Suffice to say, that the wonderous web-slinger's civilian life will never be the same again!)

And I'm certainly not going to mention the subtle new change I'm working into Spider-Man's costume. But I will award an official Marvel-style *NO PRIZE* to the very first Marvel-Ager who correctly identifies it! Watch this column for the winner's name.

Quite a few of you readers have recently noticed and praised the much tighter continuity between the three Spider-Titles. Hey guys, these things don't just happen. Do you think it's easy to coordinate three writers, six artists and one character?

A lot of hard work and effort goes into it. Luckily, however, I don't have to do any of it! (Though, if the truth be known, ye editor was twice woken from his afternoon nap last month – and once had to cut his lunch break down to a measly two and a half hours – but no sacrifice is too great where the old web-slinger is concerned.)

I used to hold monthly Spider meetings with the writers and pencilers from all three books where we'd sit around discussing plots, future storylines and new developments.

But then tragedy struck. Both J.M. DeMatteis and Roger Stern moved far away from the steel and concrete canyons of Manhattan. Hmmmm. Big problem, huh?

So what happens now? A heck of a lot of photocopying.

Copies are made of every Spider-related item that enters my office. Every Spider-related item. Plot-ties, story synopses, scripts, character sketches and penciled pages – plus anything else I can find. There's also a Spider-Man Flow Chart, which lists all of the Spider comics by title, issue number and on-sale-date... so that my creative people always know where their particular book will appear in relation to the other two spider-titles!

And then more are the phone calls as writers discuss each other's plots, suggest alternatives and generally try to discover new and exciting ways to raise my blood pressure!

Sounds pretty exhausting, huh?

Then why do I only wonder that I don't want to talk about my books?

Give to me the break!

NEXT MONTH: Tom DeFalco searches for easier employment.

"Last month I mistakenly referred to issue #241. Screwed up again.

LIFE AMONG THE BARBARIANS

by Neil Patterson

The early 1970's saw the comic book advent of literature's greatest barbarian hero, Robert E. Howard's *Conan*. The early tales of the Cimmerian by Roy Thomas and Barry Smith achieved popularity with incredible speed, and eventually almost every comic book publisher had entered the sword-and-sorcery/fantasy field. None of these efforts, though, ever approached the wide-spread success that Conan attained, to the point where the Cimmerian even overshadowed his spiritual brothers, *King Kull* and *Red Sonja*, both of whom underwent several incarnations with only moderate success (although Sonja, under Frank Thorne's pencils, became something of a cult favorite for a time).

Conan has continued to blossom, being published under three different titles: The original color comic, the bi-monthly *King Conan*, and the black-and-white title, *Savage Sword of Conan*.

And now Kull and Sonja will once again be getting the attention many have felt they've long deserved. Both will be stars on a yearly basis in their own bi-monthly titles published four times a year (Sonja as a $1.00, 48 page title, and *Kull the Conqueror*, as 48 page, $1.25 book on high-quality Mando paper).

The odd publication schedule is a result of Marvel's need to fulfill a contractual obligation to Conan Properties, Inc., Conan's legal "parents," according to Kull editor Ralph Macchio. The contract could have been honored with mere reprints, but Macchio emphasises, "We're doing the books this way because we're committed to doing a very classy barbarian book. It would be easy to say nobody cares about Kull, nobody reads it, let's just get this thing out of here as quickly as we can — and concentrate of *Conan*. But that's not what we're doing."

But how to take characters that have lived in the sizeable shadow of Conan and bring their popularity up to par with the Cimmerian? In both the case of Kull and Sonja, editors Macchio and Larry Hama went back to basics. Hama describes Sonja in these terms: "She really doesn't make much sense without the context of Conan. She was created as a foil — and taking her away from Conan is like those spin-offs from popular TV series that never work.

"You see, Conan is basically stupid. That was Howard's whole point in the first place. Howard wanted to do a character who didn't necessarily think his way out of things. The way that relates to Sonja: Sonja isn't as strong as Conan. She has to make up for that with skill, and a bit more brains. She's got to be able to outwit people."

In addition, Hama sees Sonja as a more mysterious woman than she was presented in her last incarnation. "I want to bring back the mysterious element that was there when she first showed up in the color Conan book. Sort of — who was that strange girl?" She should be a little more stand-offish, a little more haughty. She should be sure of herself. . and therefore not need anybody else. When we start to get to know too much about her, her little foibles, we start to loose that distance. I don't think that's good. It's sort of like knowing what the Lone Ranger eats for breakfast.

Macchio describes Kull as the barbarian character he likes best. "I see no reason why Kull cannot be successful if done as Kull. Granted there have been problems in the past, but I feel that during a number of periods — particularly the time that Marie and John Severin were drawing it — that it was really the highest quality barbarian book being put out. I always found Kull a more interesting,

AS THE FIGURE-HEADS OF THREE RACES WHICH DESPISE EACH OTHER, WE CAN FIGHT--
--JUST WE THREE--
--WHILE OUR MEN HALT THEIR FIGHTING TO WATCH!
OR WE THREE SMALL MEN CAN SETTLE THE DISPUTES OF THREE MIGHTY NATIONS IN A DIFFERENT WAY...
...BY REALIZING THAT WE ARE NOT ENEMIES-- AND BY BANDING TOGETHER TO OPPOSE THE TRUE AND COMMON FOE...
...THE ANCIENT FOE FROM HELL, WHICH HAS EVER DEVILED MEN-- AND WHICH HAS CAUSED THIS VERY WAR SWIRLING 'ROUND US!

more three-dimensional type of guy than Conan. I thought there was more potential in him. When the Doug Moench-John Bolton Kull story became the second-best selling *Bizarre Adventures* issue ever (only the X-Men issue surpassed it), that told me there was room for Kull — a man on a throne who is really uncomfortable with that power. And yet he killed to get that power. I find that a fascinating idea."

Alan Zelenetz, currently writing both *King Conan* and *Kull*, agrees with Macchió on Kull's more complex nature, compared to Conan. "Conan is a man with native intelligence; he's bright, and seems to be something of a natural linguist — but he seldom thinks past his current actions. He's not filled with ambition. Conan sort of stumbles across the throne of Aquilonia, while Kull actively pursued it. Unlike Conan, Kull likes and, indeed, is intrigued by civilization and the vast stores of knowledge it offers."

Zelenetz says the key to Kull is in the very words that Howard used when writing about him. "The words 'meditate', 'imagine', and 'dream' keep coming up again and again in Howard's Kull stories. Before and after the action sequences in a Kull story, Kull will frequently have a philosophical discussion with his associates about the nature of their actions, usually regarding reality versus illusion. And that is the real theme to the Kull stories: *deception* — intellectual and physical deception."

Macchio says Kull differs from Conan in the Cimmerian's own time as ruler of Aquilonia because Kull is very unsure of himself as king. "Kull is a guy who wanted all this power. He had a sense of destiny about taking this throne. At the same time, as I've said, he's been uncomfortable with the power since he's taken over — which Conan is not when he becomes king. Conan is fully aware and fully secure in the knowledge that he's king... and when he leaves Aquilonia, I don't think he expects usurpation for an instant. I think every time Kull leaves Valusia, he worries that there are assassins at his back. One of the things I like about Kull is that there's still so much that he doesn't know about where he is. Even in the castle he presumably rules from, there's all sorts of hidden passages, things he was not even aware of. It's almost like he's running a ship, but he doesn't know where all the doors lead."

Macchio says that Kull's lack of knowledge and uncertainty will come out in stories of palace intrigue. "The kind of stories that I most like are those that deal with politics — whether in medieval Europe or current-day Washington, or whatever. Stories about people with power and how they manipulate others to get and keep that power. I really like the relationship among Kull and his circle of friends and advisors, Tu, Brule, and Canub. We even want to enlarge that circle of people, to see how Kull really handles diplomacy." Macchio says Kull's image as a king is amorphous because previous writers have never really had him act like one. "It seems that whenever we see Kull on the throne he's bored, because he has to fine somebody for littering on the street or something. Yet this guy is a *king*. What does that mean? What sort of things does he have to be aware of? How does he know who his friends and enemies are? And how long is he going to be able to keep the throne? Those are some of the things I'd like to deal with in *Kull*."

Conan has been and remains a big success — but still Hama isn't completely happy with it. "I don't think the original Howard stuff has been done justice by anybody. What Roy Thomas wrote, for all it was, wasn't Howard. It lacked a lot of the gristle, that raw power, and anger, and the feeling of brute force, that was very evident in the Howard stuff. Some of the more 'Lovecraftian' comics stories have

tried to capture that feel a bit. You know, Howard was a big Lovecraft freak. That whole 'evil-older-than-the-earth', things-lurking-in-the-darkness, the whole Cthulhu-esque thing has to be explored a bit more."

Essentially, complains Hama, what's been missing from *Conan* has been monsters and sorcery with a purpose. "A lot of the monsters Conan's faced in the last few years have been just cardboard cutouts. I think a monster like that without the back up that's integral to the story is just senseless. It becomes a 1950's science-fiction film — a guy in a rubber suit."

As an editor, Hama also has to keep in mind the differing audiences for the three Conan titles. What works in one boook may not work in another. "A lot of store owners won't sell *Savage Sword* to a lot of small kids. So it's really aimed at a slightly older audience. Therefore it can be a bit more violent, a bit more suggestive, a little bit more sophisticated as to plot and characters.

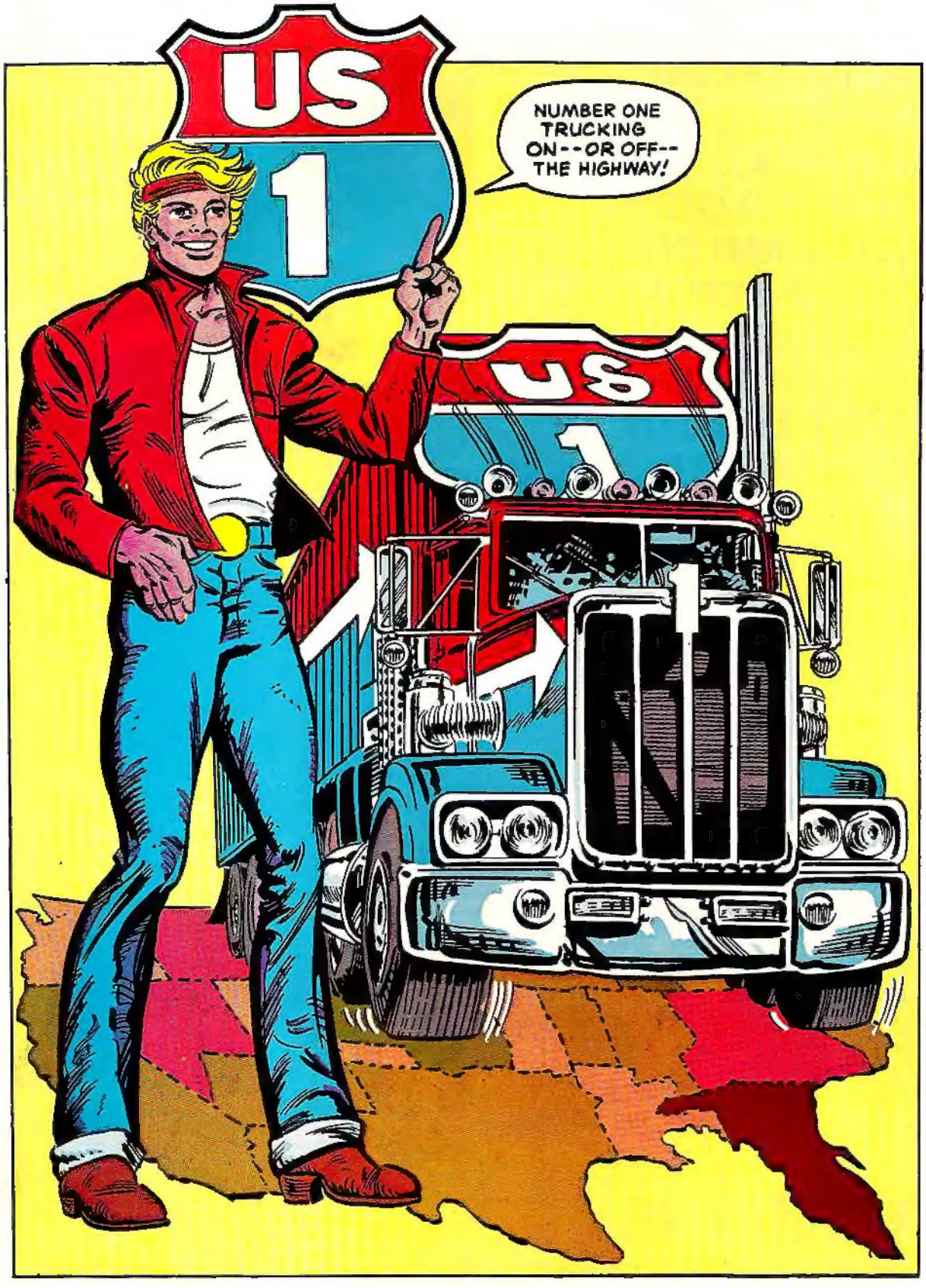
With the color Conan book, we're talking about a much wider audience range — much younger kids up to about the same age as read *Savage Sword*. Therefore the type of story has to be appropriate so it's understandable by the whole range. I'd say *King Conan* is about the same age range as the color Conan book."

The books deal with different periods in the Cimmerian's life which affects the story content as well in *Conan the Barbarian*, he's still a young man, perhaps thirty or so. In *King Conan*, he's in his fifties, firmly seated on the Aquilonian throne. And *Savage Sword* is free to deal with any part of the hero's life. Hama says, "My feeling is that in *King Conan* we deal with more social-issue type stories. It tends to get a little more soap-opera-ish... and the regular Conan color book is basically your formula monsters, occult evil, and so on. Political intrigue and things like that are in *King Conan*, because they're part of court life. In that sense, it's more like *Kull*. The regular Conan title is more straightforward adventure. In *Savage Sword* we can really be sort of experimental. We can try different types of stories. With the format of fifty-page stories, we like to get an epic feel — to have him travel and see exotic places — an Odysseus like adventure."

Each editor sums up his characters differently, forced in part to compare Kull and Sonja to Conan. So starting with Conan, Hama says "... basically stupid. Conan is not a cerebral, thinking man's hero. He's a guy who, when trapped in a room, doesn't consider strategy — he just bursts his way out." And Sonja? "The difference between Conan and Red Sonja is the difference between Fritz Lieber's Fafhrd and the Gray Mouser. Brains and brawn."

Macchio sees the difference between Kull and Conan as a difference in psychological outlook. "He's a thinking barbarian. We can make it as powerful as Conan and yet have a cerebral edge to it. Kull can be as barbaric as hell and at the same time, there's some quality that makes him pull back and look at things, and see them differently. That same quality makes him a visionary, with a sense of destiny Conan doesn't have."

Finally, Hama sums up what it takes to write heroic fantasy. "Part of what's gotten lost in sword-and-sorcery comics is that writers took over who weren't interested in that particular mythos. And in comics it's often not the writer's skills that are important, so much as a belief in the material. You can get mediocre guys that *believe* in something doing a better job than somebody who's an incredible wordsmith that doesn't believe in it."



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King Kull

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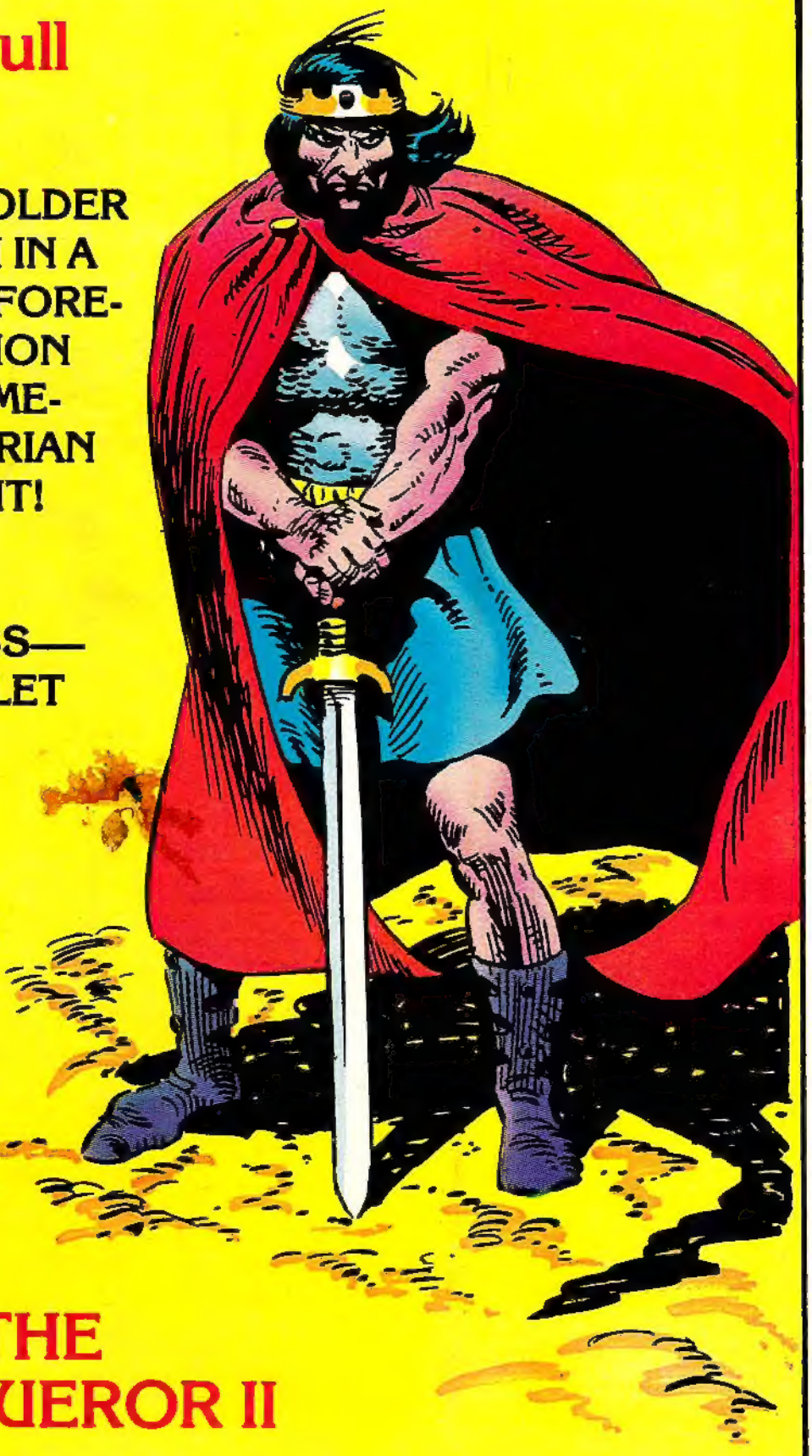

KULL THE CONQUEROR II

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